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AUTHOR Goddu, Roland; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This report grows out of efforts in two New England States, Vermont and New Hampshire, in cooperation with a regional research and development group, New England Program in Teacher Education (NEPTE), to revise teacher education programs for certification and approval so that they would be (1) local school system oriented and controlled, (2) based on goals and needs stated by the local school system, and (3) based on goals and needs-related training and education experiences for local teachers. NEPTE field staff in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine were requested to extract specific elements from State Department of Education materials submitted as staff development plans by local school districts. The field staff reports were organized by state and the following categories of need: (1) information needs, (2) training needs, (3) guidelines on policy clarification needs, and (4) support-mechanism needs. The information reported from Maine was not analyzable in its present form. The information from New Hampshire and Vermont, however, was readily accessible. The study showed that local school personnel are asking more sophisticated questions than the developers believe they are. Mission statements have had the effect of energizing local school personnel to a readiness and development level to which research and development groups must find ways to respond. (RC)

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A Study of Locally Identified Needs for Institutional Improvement in the States of New Hampshire and Vermont: A Planning Document

Roland Goddu assisted by
Carolyn Sweetser and Betsy Collins

The New England Program
in Teacher Education

Produced jointly by:

The New England Program in Teacher Education
Pettee Brook Offices
Durham, New Hampshire 03824

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education
One Dupont Circle, N.W.
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Foreword

The Clearinghouse on Teacher Education seeks continuously for data that helps to guide its information activities so that they are directly responsive to the needs of people who are doing the business of education--school and college faculty and administrators, parents and community workers, state and federal legislators, and local, state and federal government personnel.

Staff development information needs expressed from the local school district level are a rich source of data for Clearinghouse planning, although an organized and useful expression of these is impossible to produce, difficult to find, and challenging to apply at the distance-from-practice that we, as a national information analysis center, find ourselves. Also, an attempt to relate such an analysis of local staff development needs to relevant national policy development, as this report does, is felt to be an extra bonus.

The Clearinghouse is providing distribution of this report to components of the ERIC system and to the Clearinghouse's four sponsoring organizations in the hope that it will be a useful planning tool. The distribution is limited because resources are not available to do more. But the report will be available through Resources in Education in the near future.

The Clearinghouse will be pleased to hear from those who have additional, locally generated needs assessments and analyses regarding education personnel development to share

Joost Yff, Director
ERIC Clearinghouse on
Teacher Education

This report grows out of efforts in two New England States, Vermont and New Hampshire, in cooperation with a regional research and development group, NEPTE (New England Program in Teacher Education), to revise teacher education programs for certification and approval so that they would be:

1. local school system originated and controlled;
2. based on goals and needs stated by the local school system;
3. designed to provide goal and needs related training and education experiences for local teachers.

The three-year process of program development has led to approved plans for programs in the 53 supervisory unions in New Hampshire and in 18 districts in Vermont. NEPTE field staff assisted in the development phase and in the preparation of this report.

The origins of this unique teacher certification and program approval effort began officially in 1971-1972. In 1971, the State Board of Education, at the request of the Professional Standards Board in New Hampshire, mandated that each of the 53 supervisory unions develop a staff development program which would become the basis for certification and re-certification in the State. By June 1975, the planning phase had produced 53 staff development program plans. The plans were based on two earlier efforts: that resulting in the report, The Perceived Needs of Teachers,[1] and that yielding a statement of the needed goals and objectives of each union. Committees representative of students, teachers, administrators, parents, and others in each union developed a mechanism for teacher and professional education development in the union which would address their needs.

In 1971, the State Board of Education of Vermont mandated the development of a local option for teacher education whereby a local district could design and maintain a district-based and district-responsive program for all categories

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[1] NEPTE Teacher Needs Assessment Project, Subsection "State of New Hampshire," 1973 (unpublished)

of education personnel (teacher aide through superintendent) and for both pre- and in-service levels. In a parallel action, the Vermont Board of Education also required the updating of the elementary and secondary school approval procedure. By June of 1975, about 20 Vermont districts chose to develop both a local-option certification program and to renew their school program approval status based on the new procedures.

In the summer of 1975, NEPTE staff persons assigned to work on these program development activities in New Hampshire and Vermont reviewed and identified the priority needs specified in each plan. The needs statements were recorded as they appeared in the original documents, and they were collected at NEPTE central in Durham, New Hampshire. The assumption was that NEPTE support programs for training, information, and curriculum development would be most effective if they were responsive to needs as stated by teachers and by persons in local districts.

The statements were organized in general categories as reported in this document. The report was reviewed by the NEPTE staff, by the state department personnel who had been involved, and by local group members in each state. The report is submitted to assist teacher education program planners and developers who would prefer to guide program modification and renewal on systematically organized, needs-focussed information.

Scope of the Data

The original intent of this study was to determine what training resources would be needed to respond to locally identified needs of instructors in the states of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. The basis for the analysis was to be the staff development or teacher re-certification plans or program approval plans submitted to the State Department of Education in each state. It has turned out that much information is readily accessible in New Hampshire and Vermont. The information exists in Maine but is not analyzable in its present form. The study is thus limited to New Hampshire and Vermont from a reasonable yet limited sample of local districts in Vermont (8) and an almost complete sample in New Hampshire (50). While specific needs information was available from two districts in Maine, Maine is not included in this report.

Procedures

NEPTE field staff in New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine were requested to extract specific elements from State Department of Education materials submitted as staff development plans by local districts. The tasks to be performed were:

1. to analyze local staff development plans, program approval plans, local needs assessments, and the like;
2. to determine what specific needs in staff development are indicated in these papers;
3. to list these needs without organizing or categorizing;
4. to indicate any special insights about what kind of information would be needed to respond to these needs.

The field staff reports were organized by state and category of need. These are:

1. information needs;
2. training needs;
3. guidelines on policy clarification needs;

4. support-mechanism needs.

Inventory of Needs for Vermont

In general, the most often mentioned needs in Vermont are best summarized by two questions: How can a teacher best make an in-service plan for individual professional development that meets approval requirements, excites local colleges, utilizes community resources, and satisfies individual inner needs for growth?, and How can in-service programs be designed to meet teachers' needs rather than administrative expectations?

The kinds of INFORMATION NEEDS stated were those regarding:

1. job descriptions that include specificity on grade level characteristics, subject area characteristics, extra curricular responsibilities, professional obligations, and evaluation requirements;
2. models of individualized in-service programs designed by teachers;
3. models for staff growth which parallel existing expectations for pupil growth;
4. instruments for personal professional assessment;
5. knowledge about metric math, career education, reading and reaching methods, creative writing, curriculum development, values clarification and decision making, and school law.

The kinds of TRAINING NEEDS stated were for programs which develop the skills necessary to:

1. plan individualized programs;
2. ensure up-to-date methodology;
3. review content areas not covered in recent years;
4. increase understanding of children;
5. advance teacher competency in areas such as career education, school law, learning disabilities;

6. search out new solutions to educational problems;
7. build teacher self esteem;
8. develop team planning, team teaching, team curriculum development, team evaluation;
9. develop planned programs with goals, objectives and evaluation procedures.

The kinds of GUIDELINE AND POLICY CLARIFICATION NEEDS stated were:

1. means to finance in-service education
2. standards for approval of local staff development plans

The kinds of SUPPORT-MECHANISM NEEDS stated were:

1. mechanisms that integrate individual teacher programs with advanced degree programs;
2. opportunities for cross-disciplinary, cross-school-district, formal teacher development programs;
3. models for community involvement;
4. linkages with craft schools, apprentice programs and pilot programs;
5. ways of promoting publication of teacher products;
6. ways of utilizing area college resources to meet local classroom needs.

Inventory of Needs for New Hampshire

In general, the most often mentioned needs in New Hampshire seem to be best summarized by four questions:

1. How can a teacher gain the skills needed to help students feel better about themselves, their schools and the process of learning?
2. How can a teacher attract the training resources that will help in responding specifically to the needs of the learner that the teacher is working with?
3. How can a teacher improve basic skills, especially in reading?
4. How can a teacher provide valid career education information?

The kinds of INFORMATION NEEDS stated were in the areas of:

1. knowledge about improved instructional programs to teach reading skills;
2. knowledge about career guidance and personal support for students in developing the ability to make career choices;
3. knowledge about humanization and workable classroom methods;
4. knowledge about open-concept teaching;
5. techniques for recognizing learning disabilities;
6. on-going investigations of new concepts in curriculum and teaching methods;
7. knowledge of school organization to assure continuous learning from one age and grade group to the next;
8. students' attitudes and the ways to effect change in these attitudes;
9. community perception of school and of education in general;
10. techniques of presenting programs of education;
11. knowledge about school law;
12. knowledge of effective discipline techniques.

The kinds of TRAINING NEEDS stated were for programs which develop the skills necessary to:

1. individualize instruction;
2. meet the needs of children with specific learning disabilities;
3. discipline effectively;
4. promote the students' self-image, and personal and social development;
5. effectively teach the basics of education--mathematics, reading, writing, listening and speaking;
6. assist students in developing decision-making skills necessary for career planning;
7. deal with change;

8. develop alternative strategies and techniques to increase proficiency in the basics;
9. provide intellectual stimulation in subject areas;
10. develop evaluation procedures which include standardized criterion-referenced and teacher-observation techniques.

The kinds of GUIDELINE AND POLICY CLARIFICATION NEEDS stated were:

1. means to develop systems of school district accountability;
2. standards for communication between staff and administration about curriculum and training needs;
3. policies that would lead to increased communication with parents;
4. policies that would allow new teachers to learn from experienced teachers.

The kinds of SUPPORT-MECHANISM NEEDS stated were:

1. development of an ongoing local master plan for staff development and re-certification;
2. methods to initiate professional growth activities based on assessed needs of child and community;
3. procedures for higher education acceptance of individual proposals for professional growth;
4. local programs that would allow teachers to take refresher courses in their major teaching area;
5. methods to maintain an atmosphere of individual self-worth and a sense of team effort in instruction;
6. professional improvement grant programs.

Insights and Analysis

The types of needs assessment undertaken at the local level in each state tend to bury some of the specifics which are embedded in the questions that teachers want answers to. By working directly with two groups of teachers at local sites, the NEPTE staff found that most questions had a specific pattern of inquiry. The questions were of four basic levels or types:

1. Root Questions: What is it? What does it look like? Where is it?
2. Value Questions: Is it an effective teaching procedure? What teacher-student relationships are implied or needed?
3. Research-Known Questions: What studies have been done? What are the advantages and disadvantages? What problems are generally encountered? Where has it been done? Where is it most appropriate?
4. Procedures Questions: What special staff qualifications are needed? What specific techniques should be used? How to schedule? How to develop? How to handle discipline, disruption, order, space, etc.?

Teacher needs for information which tend to be stated in Procedure terms (that is, "how" terms) really carry some need for clarification at the previous three levels: Research-Known, Value, and Root. Program development efforts must respond to the publicly stated need while assuring that procedures exist to clarify and respond to the other levels of the question. Answering all of the levels of the question, which the academic/researcher may have a tendency to do, may not be useful in a local site. The support-mechanism needs statements indicate that locally responsive procedures are most critical.

Another quite visible characteristic of the information in this study is the teacher concern for response to learner needs rather than administrative expectations. Even in New Hampshire, where statements of need tended to be global, the articulation provided in many cases about programs emphasized the learner- and community-specific skills the teacher had to develop. Another way this is

indicated is through the recurring statement of a need for better communication between teachers and administrators.

Finally, there are interesting cross-state differences. The Vermont needs statements tend to assume that the basics are under control, and that improvement of practice is the public agenda. The New Hampshire statements imply the assumption that basics are to be learned. A further study might analyze the effect of the Vermont Design[2] which consolidated basic jobs in the late 1960's on the statements of expectations by Vermont educators. In contrast, New Hampshire's emphasis on local control and local goals may in part explain the focus on basics and the seeming divergence of guideline and policy clarification needs statements.

The major conclusion for any research and development agency is that responsiveness to needs requires the development of clear answers to the questions being raised and of a planning procedure which explores solutions and provides means to explore and report on all the levels of the questions being raised.

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[2] Vermont Design for Education (Montpelier: Vermont State Department of Education) 1968.

Relationship of Expressed Needs to the NIE Concept Paper

If one examines the April 24, 1975 draft of A Concept Paper for the School Practice and Service Division (NIE)[3] in the light of these findings, one observes that:

1. the NIE paper's logic does not take into account the level of sophistication of the questions being asked by some in the field;
2. the NIE paper's focus on two (or possibly three) concentrated topics for study, cataloging, linking and reporting seems not to respond to the needs in the field.

The information about process and content reported in this study indicates that the field is at a different problem-solving or adaptation stage than has been assumed by linear diffusion approaches which prescribe the stages of awareness, interest, pilot, evaluation, and adoption. The planning and development process in the two states reported on in this study indicate that many are well into the evaluation stage. Thus the information need is for exemplars and patterns, not taxonomies and links. The schools ask where can we find something happening that looks like what we need to do. Although this question can be interpreted as representing the interest stage, the data suggest that the question is best interpreted as an evaluative comment, which interpretation by more and more local school personnel will support.

The level of sophistication of the questions being asked suggests that a change is needed in ways of addressing the research and product needs of the client.

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[3] A Concept Paper for the School Practice and Service Division (Washington, D.C.: Dissemination and Resources Group, National Institute of Education) 1975. This Paper's basic ideas have been incorporated in the Statement of Work of a recent Request for Proposals let by the Institute (RFP-R-76-0006). The RFP solicits proposals that will help solve educational problems in schools by providing services to them to implement and use existing research and development outcomes. Cooperation and linkage among appropriate agencies is emphasized.

However, as an analysis document to rationalize the functions of the NIE organization, the concept paper does emphasize the need for an internal interactive system which sees school practice in terms of what is needed, and how to get it there. The fallacy may well be in applying an internal organization logic to external organizations.

The content focus that is actually required to respond to objectives and needs statements from the field are more diffuse than the two- or three-pronged strategy suggested by the concept paper. While Reading and Education and Work are included in the list of locally originated needs, they are not the only content needs. Nor does it seem that the local school can or will wait for NIE to develop its systematic, rational system. The schools are saying that they have problems now--not three to five years from now. And as advocates are arguing that service must be provided now for a learner with special needs, so the schools are asking NIE (and OE and other federal agencies) to respond equitably also to their other needs now.

The dilemma of quality and responsiveness may be resolvable only if an agency does two things at once in the content field: catalog and describe the state of the art on all major needs requests, and provide in-depth response on programmatic or politically useful topics. Relation to a specific problem-solving context requires an agency to take needs analyses as presented in this document and to prepare a catalog of resources and products that are presently available to respond to those needs. This may well reduce the amount of creative and developmental activity in the agency, but it will begin to provide a systematic context for action at the local level, and then at the agency level. A policy decision with this emphasis could be implemented through the state and interstate networks tactic described in the NIE concept paper. But such a policy would require a

different attitude and behavior on the part of the agency. That, in turn, may require modification of personnel or, at least, personnel behavior.

Examples of people, doing things that we also have to do, with enough experience to describe general patterns for us, is an immediate need for school system personnel. This need arises because of state pressure for coordinated program development and staff development--not armchair logic and/or outside intervention. The locals are asking more sophisticated questions than the developers believe they are. Mission statements such as the Vermont Design[4] and responsive organization patterns such as in the New Hampshire Staff Development Handbook have the effect of energizing local school personnel to a readiness and development level that research and development groups must find ways to respond to.

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[4] op. cit.

[5] New Hampshire Educational Resources Catalog, "Part I: New Hampshire Staff Development Handbook" (Concord: New Hampshire State Department of Education, Office of Teacher Education and Professional Standards) 1974.